



Suicide Prevention

By: Vivek Joshi
Collin Smith
Abby Melbourne

Contact: Vivek Joshi | Bettendorf, IA | vivdjoshi@gmail.com

Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation requiring suicide prevention training for school faculty every time they renew their license, the formation of a suicide prevention advisory board, and the creation of a suicide action plan by each school that would include increased school to state communication in regards to youth suicide.

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) that the State of Iowa (Iowa) should require suicide prevention training for school district faculty, the formation of a suicide prevention advisory board, and the creation a suicide action plan that would enable schools to communicate in regards to youth suicide. This legislation would allow school staff to recognize the signs of suicide in teenagers, and increase the probability that signs of potential harm will be addressed early on. The legislation would also give each school an effective response in the case that a suicide does occur and allow them to communicate with an advisory board regarding the matter.

Rationale

This bill was prompted by an incident in the Johnston community, where two students took their lives due to potentially avoidable circumstances. These two students appeared normal and content, but faculty were not educated on the warning signs of suicidal teenagers and as a result, teachers were not able to detect these signs and assist the students.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young adults in Iowa, according to the Iowa Department of Public Health. Furthermore, more than one in six students seriously consider suicide, with one in seven creating a plan for their suicide. However, these risks can be evaded with attention to the behavior of students, as four in five young adults that attempt suicide show signs of irregular behavior beforehand. This legislation will prepare faculty and appropriate officials to recognize these potential signs of irregular behavior in students, increasing the probability that signs of potential harm will be addressed early on. Under this legislation, faculty would be required to undergo suicide prevention training every time they renew their license or certification. All licensed teachers in the state of Iowa are already required to complete a Mandatory Reporting Course during relicensure. The implementation of this legislation would take place in a similar way.

In the case that a suicide does occur at a school, the school should be able to respond appropriately and effectively. Having a suicide action plan would give schools an immediate response to the suicide and increase the school to state communication with the Iowa Department of Public Health, Department of Education, and other relevant agencies that would be able to allocate additional resources to the school.

The formation of a Suicide Prevention Advisory Board would enable the legislature to stay updated on suicide in Iowa and approve training modules and courses for teachers. The board would then be able to advise the General Assembly on relevant policies to decrease the suicide rate in Iowa.

Current State Laws:

There are currently ten states (Alaska, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas) that mandate annual suicide prevention training for school personnel. In Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas, this mandate is titled the Jason Flatt Act.

There are currently seventeen states plus DC (Arkansas, Connecticut, DC, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming) that mandate training in suicide prevention for school personnel but do not specify that the training must be annual. In Arkansas, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming, the law is titled the Jason Flatt Act.

Twelve states plus DC (Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, DC, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington) require school suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention policies or suicide prevention programming statewide, while eight other states (Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia) encourage such policies or programming.

The State of Iowa currently encourages intervention programs for students that are at risk of committing suicide, but does not have any laws regarding suicide prevention training for school personnel.

Cost:

Various suicide prevention training modules for teachers are available for free download online. Such modules are provided by organizations such as the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Jason Flatt Incorporated, or local alternatives such as the Johnson County Crisis Center. This legislation would enable school districts to choose their own training module as long as it is approved by the Suicide Prevention Advisory Board.

Recommended Action

SIYAC strongly supports a bill mandating the suicide prevention training for school faculty every time they review their license, the formation of a suicide prevention advisory board, and the creation of a suicide action plan by each school that would include increased school to state communication in regards to suicide. The suicide prevention training for teachers called for in this legislation has been proposed before in the state of Iowa and was passed in the Senate in 2015. As advocates for the well-being of our state's youth, SIYAC believes that this bill is necessary to help prevent suicide in young adults.

Sources

Iowa Department of Public Health
Youth National Risk Behavior Survey (CDC)
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention